

Career and Technical Education
Promising Practices Initiative

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Division of Career and Technical Education,
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Featured Promising Practice:
***Use of an Onsite Academic/Literacy
Specialist***

Maine CTE Centers
working with this *Promising Practice*:
Capital Area Technical Center

Northern Penobscot Technical Center, Region 3

October 2006

Promising Practices descriptions and mini-case studies developed by
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PROMISING PRACTICE: *USE OF AN ONSITE ACADEMIC/LITERACY SPECIALIST*

Description

The school has an onsite academic/literacy specialist who splits his/her time between
1) providing strategic literacy interventions and academic support to struggling learners, and
2) working with CTE teachers to provide professional development, modeling, coaching, resources, and other supports to help teachers embed literacy development within CTE classes.

Why Is This a *Promising Practice*?

Maine's CTE Centers faced two pressing needs when working to improve students' literacy skills:

1. Strengthening the weak academic and literacy skills some students bring to their work in the CTE center.
2. Helping all teachers to be able to support students' literacy development given the high literacy demands of the 21st century workplace.

Some centers have explored the possibility of using onsite support through a staff position to address both of these needs. An academic/literacy specialist provides direct services to students part of the time and support services to teachers the rest of the time. For small schools in particular, this staffing pattern, coupled with additional teacher professional development and supported with technology, can enable CTE centers to meet both needs.

Supporting Students

There is much in the literature about the importance—and the effectiveness—of providing strategic interventions to develop students' weak reading, writing, and math skills at the high school level. Such interventions must be designed to *accelerate*, not merely remediate, because students need to make up for lost time. Many successful approaches incorporate the use of technology to customize instruction, provide a motivating self-paced format for student learning, and allow teachers to track student progress and respond to student needs (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004).¹ The use of technology can also support greater collaboration between the CTE center and the sending school, and enable students to work on skill development and credit recovery in both settings. Providing these services at the CTE center makes sense for logistical reasons. In addition, students may be more motivated to work on their literacy skills when these are directly connected to the competencies students need in order to succeed in their CTE program area.

Supporting Teachers

There are indications, throughout the literature, of the positive impact an on-site literacy coach has in encouraging teachers to provide literacy development as a regular part of their classroom instruction (Sturtevant, 2003).² The literacy integration goal is that all instruction will be more academically rigorous and will help students develop key reading, writing, speaking, and thinking skills.

¹ Biancarosa, C., & Snow, C. E. (2004). Reading next—A vision for action and research in middle and high school literacy: A report to Carnegie Corporation of New York. Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education. Accessed July 26, 2006 at <http://www.all4ed.org/publications/ReadingNext/ReadingNext.pdf>

² Sturtevant, E. (2003). The literacy coach: A key to improving teaching and learning in secondary schools: A report of the Alliance for Excellent Education. Accessed July 26, 2006 at <http://www.all4ed.org/publications/LiteracyCoach.pdf>

To be successful, literacy coaches must understand the literacy demands of the program areas; have a good rapport with teachers; have a clearly defined role of which everyone is aware; be supported by the director; and have adequate *time* to spend co-teaching, co-planning, modeling, and coaching teachers.³ Coaches *should not* have an evaluative role.

Keys to Success

- Percent of Time
 - ▶ It is easy for a dual role such as this to have too many expectations upon it or for one half of the role to subsume the other. Define percentages of time to be spent in each. Clarify how the academic/literacy specialist will work with students (1:1, small groups, in classes) and teachers (1:1, small groups, workshop settings). Set up and publicize a regular schedule so students and teachers will know when and how they can access the academic/literacy specialist.
- Full-time Coach
 - ▶ A full-time literacy coach has time to fulfill additional academic and administrative responsibilities; a half-time coach does not. Similarly, a full-time academic/literacy specialist has time to set up and oversee an assessment system and be the liaison with all of the sending schools regarding student needs; a half-time academic/literacy specialist does not. If the roles are combined, it is important to be realistic in defining what the focus and scope of the combined role needs to be.
- On-site Coach
 - ▶ It is important that teachers develop a knowledge base about literacy strategies through participation in other professional development opportunities. A half-time literacy coach cannot provide all of the professional development that teachers need. An onsite literacy coach can deepen and help teachers apply what they learn and can facilitate the emergence of a professional learning community focused on literacy. But an onsite coach cannot and should not be expected to be the sole source of expertise, especially in cases where he or she is still learning about literacy.
- CTE Director
 - ▶ An academic/literacy specialist cannot be the one primarily responsible for the leadership of a literacy initiative. The CTE director is the one who needs to set the expectation about literacy integration and communicate the roles and responsibilities of the academic/literacy specialist to the staff. Working closely together, the academic/literacy specialist and the director can review student and teacher needs and make adjustments as needed for how the specialist's time should be used to address priorities.

What Does It Look Like in Maine?

Two CTE centers in Maine initiated this approach in their schools during the 2005–06 school year. Although both are in the early stages of implementation, a review of their efforts is useful for others who are considering this approach. The following mini-case studies describe how and why they implemented this promising practice, what occurred, and next steps for each center.

³ For more information about recommended roles and responsibilities of literacy coaches, see the International Reading Association's Standards for Middle and High School Literacy Coaches at http://www.reading.org/downloads/resources/597coaching_standards.pdf

Promising Practice in Action: *Use of an Onsite Academic/Literacy Specialist*

Capital Area Technical Center⁴
Augusta, ME
Scott Phair, Director

- **Location:** As of 2006–07, will be adjacent to the new Cony High School
- **Student population:** Around 400
- **Number of sending schools/districts:** 8
- ▶ **Program Focus:** Academic specialist supports students literacy development and assists teachers as they implement literacy strategies in all CTE program areas.

Scott Phair talked about how the teachers at CATC are very focused on students and that there is a shared commitment to supporting critical thinking and ways to improve students literacy habits. He also stressed that teachers need concrete strategies they can use and understands the benefit in establishing school-wide expectations.

Phair estimated the ratio between shop and academic time is “80% applied, 20% theory/short lecture.” He noted that the Center draws a high percentage of students who are not academically successful at their sending schools because of weak literacy skills, issues with compliance, or the mismatch between students’ learning styles and traditional high school classes. He talked about how collaborative the climate is at CATC and how teachers often see ways to provide interdisciplinary experiences. For example, the week before the site visit, the biotechnology and law enforcement programs collaborated on a crime scene project.

Martha Pelletier, one of the teachers in the school’s Learning Center, volunteered to participate in literacy professional development during the 2005–06 school year and to bring what she learned to students and teachers. Phair recognized that Pelletier’s presentations to staff and work with students was beginning to “open the discussion.” He scheduled a two-day end-of-year retreat to focus the entire staff on the importance of literacy development. He also encouraged several teachers to attend the summer institute presented by CTE literacy mentors from throughout the state.

Strategic Interventions

CATC offers credit-bearing academic courses for students with disabilities. These are highly scaffolded reading, writing, math, science, and history classes for which students receive credits from their sending high school. Teachers use multiple levels of texts and a lot of reading aloud. Students do PowerPoint presentations in science and timelines in history.

Students are offered self-paced individual courses for credit recovery or get help with their academic work through the Learning Center. One of the two learning center teachers, Martha Pelletier, participated in the Adult Education STAR training and worked this past year with three students who met the criteria of reading at a 4th to 8th grade reading level as measured by a diagnostic assessment. Pelletier met with the students once or twice per week using the reading strategies she learned through that program, which focused on fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension.

⁴ This mini case study is based upon information gathered through conversations with CATC staff, document review, facilitation of a two-day literacy retreat with CATC staff, and data collected during an onsite visit in May 2006.

Some of the CTE programs had as many as 25% of identified special needs students. Many of these students attended CATC daily for the whole day—they were in the auto reconditioning or building trades classes for half of the day, and math, science, English, and history classes during the other half.

Helping Teachers Help Struggling Learners

The director supported Pelletier to attend the STAR training and other professional development around the state, including a workshop by Jean Lawrence in Region 8. Pelletier sometimes used 10 minutes to present what she had learned from different workshops during the faculty meetings held twice per month. She also facilitated a workshop on how to use the www.lexiles.com site. If teachers were interested in templates or specific strategies, Pelletier would meet with them one-on-one to provide more information.

Planning for Next Year

Several teachers, on a teacher-by-teacher basis, at CATC already integrate reading and writing expectations into their CTE program area classes. Teachers believe that with many or most of their students being reluctant or weak readers and writers, they have an obligation to work on these issues collectively. That way, all students will get the opportunity and instruction they need to develop these skills within the learning context of the CTE center.

CATC educators have just begun to make literacy a collective focus. During a two-day retreat in June, CATC teachers identified strategies they planned to use, made agreements, and strengthened their collective focus on literacy development. There were plans in place to use early release days and staff meetings during 2006–07 to continue the literacy work by sharing strategies and revisiting agreements. The goal was to make sure supports would be in place to help students meet the varying reading, writing, presenting, and thinking demands of each of the CTE program areas.

The academic/literacy specialist's time will be divided between working with students and working with teachers. This will help ensure students are getting the help they need in pull-out high support settings and within CTE program area classes.

Next Steps

- Regarding Sending Schools:
 - ▶ Receive students' reading level data and communicate it to teachers.
 - ▶ Discuss what types of literacy habits and skills would be helpful for students to bring to CATC to be successful.
 - ▶ Work to determine how those skills will be developed in 9th and 10th grade classes.
- Keep the literacy focus front and center by ensuring there is time for sharing and for solidifying agreements in the fall during early release days and faculty meetings.
- Establish an expectation that teachers use literacy strategies with 50% of their classroom instruction.
- Provide staff with additional literacy professional development. Establish a professional library onsite for teachers to reference.
- Articulate the literacy habits and skills that will be focused upon for each program area.
- Develop common portfolio reading and writing requirements across programs.
- Have the academic/literacy specialist work with teachers to determine additional strategies they can use to build students' literacy skills.

For more information, contact Scott Phair, Director, or Martha Pelletier, Academic/Literacy Specialist.

Promising Practice in Action: *Use of an Onsite Academic/Literacy Specialist*

Northern Penobscot Technical Center⁵
Region 3
Lincoln, ME
Al Dickey, Director

- **Location:** Region 3's CTE center is in four physical locations throughout the region, with the main facility in Lincoln
- **Student population:** 250 (125 at Lincoln)
- **Sending schools/districts:** 5
 - ▶ **Program focus:** Use of the position of an onsite academic/literacy specialist to provide support to students and teachers.

Al Dickey faced major challenges—students who liked their CTE classes but were unmotivated academically; the reality of a changing and more demanding 21st century workplace; teachers who were unsure about how to do academic or literacy integration; and four locations in which to get it all done. Sending schools were uncertain why the CTE director was suddenly talking about literacy and academic rigor, insisting that they needed to work more closely together to support student success, and providing CTE teachers with literacy teacher professional development. Dickey responded to the challenge of changing expectations by adding a new staff position “to help move things in the right direction.”

At the beginning of the 2005–06 school year, Dickey hired Bethany Hatt to work 60% time as a team teacher in four CTE program areas: automotive, health occupations, building trades, and culinary arts. The other 40% of Hatt's time is spent supporting students through use of the PLATO learning system.

Supporting Students

Hatt set up a PLATO lab with four computers at the Lincoln CTE facility. The program is web-based so students can access it from their sending schools. Eight students came to the lab for one-half to one hour daily during the 2005–06 school year. Hatt said she was pleased with the progress students made and liked the way they could learn in a self-paced environment while she provided “just in time” instruction. She hopes to expand the program next year to serve more students.

Supporting Teachers

Hatt attended several professional development sessions offered throughout the state to increase her own knowledge about literacy. She worked on developing relationships with teachers and looked at ways that reading, writing, and math could be integrated into each of the four program areas. The teachers who worked with Hatt met monthly as a group to discuss what they were doing in the classroom and to support one another. Hatt also went into classes on a regular schedule on a once/week basis. She was able to facilitate a variety of English and math activities connected to what was being worked on in each program area. Sometimes she taught lessons, sometimes she co-taught with the instructor. Both Hatt and the teachers noted the importance of having time to plan together.

⁵ This mini case study is based on information gathered through multiple meetings with Region 3 CTE staff, document review, and data collected during an onsite visit in May 2006.

What Teachers Said

All of the teachers with whom Hatt worked voiced the importance of academic rigor and literacy integration. Teachers noted they were doing some work with reading, writing, math, and critical thinking prior to the 2005–06 school year, but they all described new things they did in 2005–06 because of the encouragement and the support. These teachers also said several other teachers asked about what they were doing and seemed to be trying out some of the literacy support strategies in other program areas. Finally, the participating teachers noted that they need to do academic integration and literacy development “more like once a week instead of two or three times per quarter.”

The four teachers voiced concern that they need to learn to differentiate the use of the strategies in the classroom the way they already do in the shop. Teachers voiced a frustration at the wide range of abilities students brought, especially the lack of critical thinking skills, and they said the literacy strategies are helpful. In the 2006–07 school year, the teachers want to focus on a few common strategies that will really help them support students’ skills in ways that are applicable to the CTE program areas. The teachers also want more strategies they can use.

The participating teachers said they found students much more open to “doing the reading and math” when it was in the CTE environment. “The content area is something that interests them and they’ll say ‘okay, I’ll give it a shot, let’s see’ and that’s the door opening a crack.” Teachers noted that the relationships they have with students gave them credibility. The consensus is that if the CTE teachers told the students they needed to do this, they will “go with it.” For example, in the automotive program the students did an oral presentation based on an inquiry topic of their choice. “I’ve never done an oral presentation but it actually came out quite well...you know, if you as a teacher promote the need, encourage, show some support...the kids believe in what we say. They trust us, they know we as teachers don’t like spinning their wheels.” However, teachers stressed the need to establish expectations up front with sending schools so students will know that they need to read, write, and present as part of their CTE program.

The teachers who worked with Hatt in the 2005–06 school year acknowledged the need for literacy development. They saw the need for themselves—and the students—to have a “toolbox” of strategies. Knowing how to read, write, and think—in the words of one teacher, is “what separates the shingle haulers from the ones running the job.”

Additional Staff Professional Development

Dickey encouraged staff to take advantage of the CTE mentor program and two of his teachers participated, developing applications of the literacy strategies for their program areas and increasing their capacity to develop literacy skills in the CTE classroom. All staff participated in three on-site two-hour workshops, with literacy consultant Tanya Baker, focused on literacy strategies for teaching vocabulary and scaffolding the reading process. This provided staff with concrete strategies they could begin to use.

Use of Data

Accuplacer data was used to determine which students should work with Hatt using the PLATO system. The director will investigate ways to get a lexile score for each student and to track both student and program progress.

Evidence in the Classroom

Despite the adjustment to a new schedule, beginning after the school year started, and facing technology challenges, there was evidence that students were helped directly in the PLATO lab

and that instruction was more rigorous and incorporated more literacy in the four program areas where Hatt focused her efforts. Examples included:

- *Automotive*: Students received training in service writing and writing repair orders; oral presentations/demonstrations on a topic of interest; discussion of articles; measurement; and problem solving.
- *Health Occupations*: Students had repeated opportunities to do essay writing; reaction papers; chart reading; summarizing; and reading strategies (KWL).
- *Building Trades*: Students completed textbook survey; learned applications for fractions; and practiced reading strategies (Anticipation/reaction guide, word sort) and reading for information.
- *Culinary Arts*: Students focused on the following: research and inquiry; reading for information; writing; text structures (elements of a restaurant review, formal essay, menus); reading strategies (word sort).

One of the biggest shifts may be as yet invisible. The teachers who worked with Hatt said they were focused on where they needed to help students reach in terms of reading, writing, and math as it pertains to each program area. Teachers were more aware of what students needed—and lacked—in terms of their academic literacy skills. More teachers asked Hatt for assistance. At the end of the year, students began to ask Hatt if they could work with her to get extra help using the PLATO system. Hatt is researching getting more licenses for next year.

Next Steps

- Summarize plans for next year and publicize them to staff and sending schools.
- Publicly discuss the importance of academic integration and literacy development with students, parents, CTE staff, and sending schools verbally and in writing. Clarify the types of literacy skills that students will work on while at the CTE center.
- Continue supporting the current teacher team and find ways to work with additional teachers.
- Establish an expectation that teachers will be using literacy strategies or academic integration with 50% of their classroom instruction.
- Discuss the need for data on student reading and math abilities with the sending schools.
- Provide additional professional development to teachers.
- Develop a common toolkit of literacy strategies with examples that all teachers can use.
- Develop a plan for monitoring student progress and program progress.
- Investigate ways technology can assist with distance issues, both to serve students and to support teachers.
- Maintain a list of successful academic integration and literacy development activities and disseminate to staff.
- Increase the variety and amount of reading students do in each program area and suggest ways teachers can incorporate literacy strategies into reading assignments.
- Review the schedule to ensure students are not missing out on academic rigor/literacy development.

For more information, contact Al Dickey, Director, or Bethany Hatt, Academic/Literacy Specialist.